R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 013 575 FL 000 396

ON RUSSIAN IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF WESTERN CANADA.

BY- HARSHENIN, ALEX F.

PUB DATE MAR 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.76 19P.

DESCRIPTORS- *SLAVIC LANGUAGES, *RUSSIAN, *SECONDARY SCHOOLS, *ENROLLMENT TRENDS, *MODERN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM, FOREIGN COUNTRIES, LANGUAGE RESEARCH, BILINGUALISM, CURRICULUM PROBLEMS, PROGRAM EVALUATION, SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, TEACHER SHORTAGE, ELECTIVE SUBJECTS, WESTERN CANADA,

ALTHOUGH THE ENROLLMENT IN COURSES IN UKRANIAN IN WESTERN CANADA'S SECONDARY SCHOOLS CONTINUES TO INCREASE NORMALLY, THE DEMAND FOR RUSSIAN DECLINES PROGRESSIVELY. FACTORS AFFECTING THE ENROLLMENT TRENDS ARE (1) THE UNDERSTANDABLE PREFERENCE OF THE PREDOMINANTLY UKRANIAN POPULATION OF THE PRAIRIE STATES TO STUDY THEIR PARENT TONGUE, (2) THE LOCAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' JUSTIFIED RELUCTANCE TO IMPLEMENT AS AN ELECTIVE A SUBJECT THAT HAS SUCH A MARKED INADEQUACY OF QUALIFIED TEACHERS, AND (3) THE PRIORITY GIVEN TO THE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH AS THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF CANADA. NEVERTHELESS, RUSSIA, BECAUSE OF ITS GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITY, IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO CANADA. BECOMING INCREASINGLY MORE SIGNIFICANT ARE (1) FISHING, TRADING, AND TRAVEL CONTACTS, (2) THE VOLUME OF RUSSIAN RESEARCH, (3) THE NEED FOR EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE AND PERSONS, AND (4) THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG CANADIANS TO COMBINE A KNOWLEDGE OF RUSSIAN WITH OTHER FIELDS OF ENDEAVOR. IF THE STUDY OF THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IS TO BECOME REALISTICALLY MORE ATTRACTIVE AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL, THERE MUST BE A COMPLETE REVISION OF THE PROGRAM, APPROACH, AND RELATED MATERIALS AS WELL AS AN IMMEDIATE ATTEMPT TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND INCREASE THE NUMBER OF ADEQUATELY TRAINED TEACHERS. (AB)

ED013575

ON RUSSIAN IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF WESTERN CANADA

Alex P. Harshenin
University of British Columbia

The first Slavic language to be authorized in any Canadian public school was not Russian but Ukrainian. First approved fourteen years ago in Saskatchewan, Ukrainian became established as a regular secondary school subject, setting a precedent for its subsequent introduction in the high schools of the remaining prairie provinces, Alberta in 1959 and Manitoba in 1962. Not to be outdone, Manitoba adopted two courses in Ukrainian, one for the university program and another for the general. Eight years after Ukrainian, Russian appeared[1] on the western Canadian scene, initially in British Columbia in 1960, then in Saskatchewan in 1962 and in Alberta in 1965. Of the four western provinces, B.C. still teaches no Ukrainian and Manitoba no Russian.

Since their respective appearances in the secondary school curricula of Western Canada, the two Slavic languages have fared quite differently, Ukrainian developing a fairly stable, growing enrolment and Russian progressively declining. It will be the main purpose of this paper[2] to attempt an examination of the factors affecting the rise of one and fall of the other and to suggest possible ways of improving the future prospects of Russian.

FL 000 396

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

One of the foremost factors affecting the teaching of foreign languages (FLs) in Canada is the special status of French. Canada is constitutionally a bilingual country with French and English having equal national status. This means that French is not a foreign language in Canada as are German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian or Greek and Latin, wherever they are taught in schools. Thus, if a second language is to be started in English-speaking Canada, priority is generally given to French and in French-speaking Canada (mainly in the province of Quebec) to English. All FLs in the country then must compete with French in its strong position and with one another[3].

That French has a rightful, favored place among languages in Canadian schools is understandable in the light of the foregoing, and if it is important enough to the nation, all English-speaking Canadians ought to learn French in secondary school or earlier. But should the advantageous position of French be used to the disadvantage of the other languages and, in some cases, of the academic student? While students of varied ethnic backgrounds often select French, commonly it is only the academic student requiring a second language because he is on a university program who ends up taking French, sometimes for the sole reason that there is no alternative language offered in his school, whereas actually, a second language other than French may be of far greater interest to him or of greater import to his future work. As for the other languages in Canada, their competition and problems are severe

enough already.[4] Curiously, however, Russian's greatest rival in the prairie provinces is not French, but its sister Slavic language.

The rising significance of Ukrainian in the prairies appears to have had a negative effect on the teaching of Russian, which has become a superfluous second Slavic language. Ukrainian is firmly "in", whereas Russian is not, presumably because of "lack of public demand".

Though action at the provincial government level is necessary for a subject's adoption, the role of the local public and school authorities must not be underestimated. To have a new subject accepted in a provincial curriculum many different people may be involved: professional bodies of university instructors, school teachers and administrators, P.T.A.s, ethnic, religious and commercial groups, and perhaps even a Royal Commission.[5] Then, after recognizing the public demand and seeing to it that an appropriate program is prepared and textbooks and teachers are available, the Department of Education may approve the subject, but the final choice of an optional subject in a given school rests with the local people and school administrators. The nature and interests of the local populace have considerable relevance when, for example, a choice between two electives such as Russian and Ukrainian is involved, especially if the provincial population is too small to adequately support both Slavic languages. In every western province the largest Slavic ethnic group by far is Ukrainian, which in turn is the third largest ethnic group in the prairies after English and

German respectively.[6] The reasons for the "public" in these provinces preferring Ukrainian to Russian from the outset thus becomes much clearer.

Also of consequence at the local level is the school principal, the key figure in an elective subject's implementation, timetabling, teacher assignment and general encouragement. With the backing of his school board, he may find or fail to find for the course a "qualified" teacher, sufficient and suitable hours in the timetable, and proper classrooms. An example of how effectively a principal's actions can suppress such a subject in spite of local demand comes from a teacher's experience in B.C. To guarantee a large enrolment in the first Russian class, general program students were permitted to join those in the academic stream. The following year, in addition to insisting that at least thirty students register for the Russian course, the principal arranged the timetable in such a way that the majority, the group of general students, simply could not enrol. Consequently, "too few" students enrolled and the subject was discontinued. From the teacher's point of view, however, the small class in Russian would have been ideal!

Teachers too, by the degree of their competence and involvement and by the nature of their attitudes can determine the success or failure of an optional language course. One teacher refused to teach the first Russian course the second year it was offered when most of the students enrolling proved to be of Slavic background. Problematic as

this student interest is, it has helped many second language courses on their way to success. Such a common variety of local support need not be disparaged. The teacher admitted as much in expressing quite another attitude toward the many students of German background in his German classes.

It is at this point that the teacher's preparation becomes paramount. An education official's complaint that there is a lack of qualified teachers seems to have some basis in fact. According to teachers' statements the average formal training of a teacher of Russian or Ukrainian usually consists of two or three university courses in the language and some speaking ability. Generally, no FL methods or linguistic courses are mentioned. In Manitoba, the minimum stipulated qualification to instruct in the Ukrainian language is "a standing equivalent to Ukrainian II at the University". In Alberta, the number of years of formal study is not stipulated but the teachers usually chosen are those who speak the language. Many of the teachers first asked "to try" the "experimental" Russian course in B.C. were no better prepared than those in the prairies. By the more demanding newer standards for FL teachers' preparation, one cannot but agree that there is a lack of truly qualified teachers[7], but surely the solution to the problem is not in discontinuing the present Slavic language programs. Instead, the programs ought to be reviewed and, where necessary, revised and the standards of all present and prospective teachers raised. If the languages are dropped as Russian has been in all Saskatchewan and

B.C. schools but one, and the authorities use such objections as teacher shortages as excuses to eliminate Russian altogether or to postpone it indefinitely, they will never have the qualified teachers they need. How many prospective teachers will select a Russian major at university, or Russian majors consider teaching in the high schools, if the prospects for the language are so poor? However, once teachers with preparation in Russian are in the schools their qualifications can be upgraded, even as a prior condition to teaching the subject.

Thus, it becomes evident that local support in its varied aspects is of crucial importance to an optional FL course. Other substantial and more widespread support for FLs must be encouraged. Needless to say, the plight of Russian in Canadian schools is uppermost in my mind.

In the U.S.S.R., English is considered significant enough for a nation living in a new age to have an overwhelming majority of Russian students studying it. "According to Soviet educational statistics, about ninety percent of the students in secondary schools study English, about thirty percent take German, and the rest enroll in Spanish or French."[8] There are many vital reasons why Canadians in large numbers should be learning Russian: apart from any military or political reasons for knowing Russian, or the traditional values of second language and literature studies, there are the ever-increasing and varied contacts between Russians and Canadians by virtue of their geographic proximity, fishing in common waters (in many senses), expanding trade

relations,[9] the multiplying volume of Russian research in all major fields, principally in the sciences (all described in Russian), the obvious need for exchange of knowledge and people in these and other areas (cultural, social, economic, etc.), the growing opportunities for young Canadians to combine a knowledge of Russian with careers in various fields (the pure, physical and social sciences, engineering, education and other academic specializations, library, translation, communications, journalism, business and government), not to mention the increasing opportunities for travel in Eastern Europe where Russian is widely studied and in the U.S.S.R. itself. We Canadians like to think that our country is making a worthwhile contribution to world affairs. Yet how can we contribute effectively without doing our part in reducing the barriers to communication by breaking our relative linguistic isolation to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas and to further the international understanding on which the future welfare of the world depends?

It is clear that Russian is extremely important to Canada. Many more Canadians ought to be learning the language. But the situation is not likely to change much unless there is demand from the "top". A negative factor affecting FLs in general and Russian in particular is the absence of Federal Government financial and legislative assistance. In Canada there is nothing comparable to American aid to FLs and they therefore continue to be weak as they were in the United States before the National Defence Education Act[10] was passed in 1958. Nothing would

eliminate local disinterest and inertia regarding FLs quicker than a healthy injection of the wonder-working power of the dollar! The Canadian Government is already aiding (up to 50%) technical and vocational secondary programs and institutes and sharing in the training of teachers, supervisors and administrators for them. In cooperation with industry, it is also contributing (from 50 - 75%) to the cost of "training to allow employees to upgrade their skills (including basic training in mathematics, science and languages.)"[11] Without interfering in local or provincial autonomy in educational matters, official Federal concern could be expressed for FLs in secondary schools in a number of positive ways: the provision of bursaries for teachers to attend special summer sessions for "total immersion" in their languages, initial and refresher courses on methodology and applied linguistics; the support and encouragement of workshops, institutes and a variety of in-service activities as well as exchange programs to assist teachers in going to the languages' native countries for the sort of invaluable linguistic and cultural experience that cannot be duplicated anywhere. The U.S. Government's interest in languages has benefited FLs at all levels of learning and the nation itself has been doubly enriched thereby. If Canada could catch the cue!

Another factor not to be ignored is a language's status as an accredited subject. That a language like Russian be an elective is only common sense, but when it is offered as a 1 - 2 year "experimental" course, as in B.C., or for any other reason fails to constitute a major or to satisfy university entrance FL requirements, there can be no great

expectations. When Ukrainian was recognized as a major meeting university admission requirements, its future was assured. The same appears to be true of Russian in Ontario, in spite of many other problems.[12] Another essential aspect of a language major is its continuity on to university courses. The forgetting rate being what it is, a language studied for only two years at the grade 9 - 10 or 10 - 11 level and then discontinued for a year or two carries a distinct disadvantage for the potential university student. Especially in B.C., Russian has suffered enormously from the detrimental effects of such shortcomings.

In addition to the foregoing aspects of the FL major, the nature of the language program itself is of great importance. The typical Russian program in Western Canada is two years in length, with little more course organization and guidance for the teacher than the prescribed text, and with vaguely-defined aims and approach. It has little chance of success in view of its inherent weaknesses and the formidable outside linguistic competition. A review of the short history of Russian in Western Canada confirms this conclusion.

Much can be learned from the experiences of others as well as one's own. Based on the widely accepted and well-founded views that language learning is most successful during the younger years and that the fundamentals of a language cannot be acquired in a year or two in any schools employing traditional methods, some suggestions for improving the Russian programs can be made. A change to a four-year integrated high school program with clearly-defined aims, an updated approach, suitable

textbooks and materials and a good course outline providing the necessary guidelines would be a sound beginning. Audio-visual or audio-lingual materials comparable to Harcourt, Brace and World's Audio-Lingual Materials Russian (Levels I — IV) - including textbooks, tapes and teacher's handbooks are quite superior to anything now in use in the Western provinces.[13] And finally, there should be complete coordination of materials and methodology, not to mention details like timetabling!

The main factors affecting the teaching of Slavic languages, particularly Russian, have now been presented. With respect to the role of French and the other second languages, little more can be done than to plead equality of opportunity for Russian in school curricula of Western Canada. In the prairie provinces for the time being at least it almost seems wisest simply to wish Ukrainian well and leave Russian dormant until there is Federal recognition and assistance. The local public vouches for Ukrainian; at any rate, both languages do not seem possible there at the moment. Other deterrents to Russian can be overcome, certainly in B.C., through the language's full acceptance as a serious secondary school FL major, by a thorough revision of its program, a new approach with materials to match, and by an immediate improvement in the quality and number of trained teachers. In short, the Russian language course, its program, methodology, language skills, achievement — everything about it — has to be made realistically attractive, a secondary school subject to be sought after and not spurned because of its apparent poverty or feared because of a few strange-looking letters in

its alphabet. With well-laid plans, adequately-prepared personnel and a genuinely impressive FL product giving gratifying results, there should be no lack of demand from an alerted public. Russian at its best today should be "selling itself", creating its own continuing demand, and satisfying both the earnest student and the anxious taxpayer.

APPENDIX

A Summary of Background Information on Russian and Ukrainian in Western Canadian Secondary Schools

Language	PAST	PRESENT					FUTURE
	Province and year of introduction	No. of schools	No. of students	Program length (years)	Grades taught	University requirement satisfied	Prospects
RUSSIAN	B.C. 1960	0	0	2	9-12	yes	poor
	Sask. 1962	1	13	2	9-10	yes	poor
	Alta. 1965	4	68	2	10-11	yes	poor
UKRAINIAN	Sask. 1952	16	870	4	9-12	yes	good
	Alta. 1959	17	611	3	10-12	yes	good
	Man. 1962	?	354	4	9-12	yes	good

Supplementary Notations

1. The enrolment and school figures are for 1966/67, except for Manitoba (1965/66) and Saskatchewan (for Ukrainian - Jan. 1963), the latter thought by the provincial Director of Curricula to be approximately the same for the current year.

2. The largest enrolment in Russian was recorded during the first year of its offering both in B.C. (70 in 3 schools) and in Alberta (119 in 4 schools). No first year figures were supplied for Saskatchewan, but it was indicated that the language had been offered without success in some city schools.

3. Russian in Saskatchewan was originally introduced at the grade 11-12 level. One school located in a rural area with a population largely of Russian ethnic background now teaches it in grades 9-10 to a total of 13 students.

4. The latest official word from Alberta on Russian that "There has been some difficulty about maintaining interest" merely confirms what can be deduced from the foregoing information regarding the trend of Russian in that province. At present there is apparently not sufficient demand for the language to justify the introduction of the third (grade 12) Russian course. It would seem that Russian is on the way out in Alberta as in B.C. earlier and Saskatchewan.

5. The Alberta enrolment figure for Ukrainian includes 106 students at the grade 8-9 level in three schools experimenting with "an oral approach". Some experimentation with Ukrainian is also going on below grade 9 in Saskatchewan.

6. The minimum high school FL study fulfilling university entrance requirements in Western Canada is two years.

NOTES

1. Ontario introduced Russian into its secondary schools in the same year as B.C.
2. My main sources for data in this paper are copies of the current questionnaire being circulated by the Canadian Association of Slavists in its survey of the teaching of Slavic languages in Canadian schools and letters from provincial education officials and teachers. For a tabular summary of some of the historical and statistical data see the APPENDIX of this paper.
3. In Ontario, Latin too, has a somewhat unique status in being prerequisite for university entrance to Moderns (FL) courses. Rather appropriately, the remaining modern languages are called the "third languages". The problems of German, Italian, Russian and Spanish in Ontario are discussed in Report No. 3 of the Modern Language Committee, Ontario Curriculum Institute, Third Language Study in the Secondary Schools, (August 1965).
4. In one B.C. school, the principal allowed only students with A and B grades in French to take Russian, thereby disqualifying the substantial group of general program students and forcing the better students of the academic group to take two FLs, if they happened to be interested in Russian. In all fairness to the principal, however, it ought to be pointed out that Russian does not constitute a second language major in B.C.; he may have only been trying to protect the academic student.

5. In its 1960 Report, the B.C. Royal Commission on Education approved the steps then being taken to introduce Russian as an elective in the secondary curriculum. For details see: Province of British Columbia, Report of the Royal Commission on Education (Victoria, 1960), pp. 318-319.

6. Here the term "English" is used in its broadest sense meaning "people from the British Isles". Some of the 1961 Canada Census "Ethnic Group" (traced through one's father) figures may be of interest:

	Total Population	Ukrainian	Russian
B.C.	1,629,082	35,640	27,448
Alberta	1,331,944	105,923	17,952
Saskatchewan	925,181	78,851	22,481
Manitoba	921,686	105,372	7,938
CANADA	18,238,247	473,337	119,168

7. Among the more recently recommended teacher qualification standards are the "Qualifications for Secondary School Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages" in The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Vol. 39, No. 214 (November, 1955), pp. 30-33. A more comprehensive treatment of the whole subject of FL teacher education may be found in "Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages: An Exposition", Modern Language Journal Vol. L, No. 6 (October, 1966), pp. 323-425.

8. A. A. Sokolsky, "Foreign-Language Teaching in the U.S.S.R.", University of South Florida Language Quarterly, Vol. IV, No. 3-4 (Spring-Summer, 1966), p. 34.

9. A colleague, Dr. D. Dorotich, informed me that at the January 1967 "Canada-Eastern Europe" conference he attended in Ottawa, one of the points made was that foreign trade cries for expansion and many opportunities are lost through lack of knowledge of the language and area.

10. American enrolment figures show the quick growth of Russian since NDEA.

    a) One year before NDEA, in 1956/57, 16 schools taught Russian. Three years after the Act, in 1961/62, 800 schools were teaching it. This information comes from a booklet which is an excellent source for details on the subject expressed in its title: AATSEEL's Why Study Russian? (New York—New Jersey Regional Chapter, 1963), p. 4.

    b) A set of figures from MLA's Foreign Language Annals, No. 1 (October, 1966), p. 7, gives another perspective: In 1958 U.S. Russian enrolment was 4,055 students, 0.1% of the total public high school population of which 16.4% were enrolled in any FL compared with 1964 in which the enrolment was 20,485 or 0.2% of the total of which 26.2% were enrolled in a FL.

    c) A figure for all U.S. high schools is quoted for 1963 as 23, 839 in AATSEEL's Newsletter, Series 8, Letter 3(December, 1966), p. 2.

11. Underlining mine. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, The Organization and Administration of Public Schools in Canada (Ottawa, Third Edition - 1966), pp. 193-194.

12. See fn. 3.

13. The common text in the western provinces has been J. C. Doherty and R. L. Marcus, First Course in Russian, Copp Clark. Teachers' ratings of this traditionally oriented textbook ranged from "fair" to "good". Most of these teachers were themselves taught in traditional ways which, for the most part, it can be assumed they have been perpetuating.

March, 1967.